

MEMORIAL

OF

Sundry Inhabitants of Petersburg, in Virginia,

UPON THE SUBJECT OF

The Proposed Tariff.

FEBRUARY 20, 1824.

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MEMORIAL.

At a meeting of the citizens of Petersburg, held at the court house, on Friday, the 13th February, 1824, called by the Mayor, to receive the report of the committee to whom had been referred, at a previous meeting, a letter from the Chamber of Commerce of New York, on the subject of the proposed tariff of duties at present under the consideration of Congress, JOHN H. BROWN, Mayor, in the chair, and EDWARD PESCUO secretary—

Doct. THOMAS ROBINSON, from said committee, presented the following memorial, which, after being read, was unanimously agreed to, and copies ordered to be transmitted to the Representative from this district, as well as to each of the Senators and Representatives from Virginia in the Congress of the United States; and likewise to the Chamber of Commerce of the city of New York, and other principal cities of the Union:

Your memorialists, the merchants of Petersburg, Virginia, obtrude their sentiments on your honorable House a second time with reluctance, on the subject of the tariff duties; but the persevering selfishness of our manufacturing associations, demanding nothing less than the annihilation of the mercantile and agricultural interests of the nation, to promote their own schemes of rapid aggrandizement, leave us no other alternative than either to appeal again to the wisdom of our representatives, or appear, by our silence, to acquiesce in a measure of the most ruinous tendency; for such we conceive the bill for the alteration of the tariff duties, now before your honorable body, to be. The ablest statesmen, both theoretical and practical, of the commercial nations of Europe, have acknowledged, nay demonstrated, that every interference of government to direct or regulate the employment of private capital or enterprise, has been attended with mischief. They deplore the evils in which those nations have been involved by pursuing a system of bounties, monopolies, and protecting duties, and are endeavoring to retrace their steps at the very moment our legislators are invited to involve themselves in the same labyrinth. But we do not object to the projected tariff merely on this general, though strong ground, the experience of other nations. We object, first, that the Congress of the United States did not, with the power of *regulating*, receive from our Constitution also the power of *annihilating* foreign commerce; such as is evidently the tendency, and such as, of course, we believe to be the intent of the bill in question. We be-

lieve that the power of regulating foreign commerce was conceded for a very different purpose, to wit, principally with a view to prevent the evils apprehended from a collision of interests among the independent sovereignties of which our republic is composed, and also to supply a revenue for the support of the General Government, without the necessity of resorting to internal taxation. Retaliation, in certain cases, might have been thought of, but that any further restrictions, save such as might secure us the necessary munitions of war, were contemplated by the framers of our Constitution, we utterly disbelieve; and against the exercise of implied powers we solemnly protest. Nor can we see how the projected alterations of the tariff can be supported under the clause of the Constitution granting powers for regulating commerce, seeing that the bill is avowedly introduced for an object entirely distinct from the regulation of commerce, to wit, the establishment of manufacturing monopolies. We can scarcely doubt that the nations of Europe, who have hitherto been accustomed to receive our raw materials, will retaliate by encouraging the productions of other countries, to the exclusion of ours. The effect of such re-action would be fatal both to the mercantile and agricultural interests. That those nations will consent to send back our ships ballasted with dollars, few will be so visionary as to expect. Without reciprocity, commerce cannot exist, and therefore it is, that we consider the annihilation of foreign commerce as a necessary consequence of the projected alteration of the tariff. Secondly: The tariff, as it now stands, bears very unequally on different sections of our extensive country; and this inequality will be still more sensibly felt if the proposed alterations are adopted. It is always unjust and impolitic to tax the many for the emolument of the few; but it seems peculiarly dangerous, in a confederation like ours, to introduce the seeds of jealousy and discord among our independent states, by declaring one section tributary to another. This has already been partially effected, and will be completed by the passage of the bill in question. That the tax on every article is ultimately paid by the consumer, is universally understood, as well as that the great bulk of the consumers, particularly in this country, are agriculturists, on whom, of course, the principal weight falls; but while the agricultural interest is thus generally taxed, the southern agriculturists are to be particularly burdened by the enormous weight thrown on those coarse fabrics which constitute the clothing of our negroes. In return for this we are promised a northern market for our produce. Will any one believe that the northern manufacturers, who at present do not consume more than from 60,000 to 80,000 bales of cotton annually, will take off our hands, at the European prices, 600,000 bales? Or will he believe that the appetite of a ploughman, on turning weaver, will be so much improved that the surplus grain we have hitherto been accustomed to export to Europe, will be consumed at home? Thirdly: We believe that our manufacturers are most extravagantly protected already. In England it is calculated that every manufacturer pays two days labor in the week to his government. This is at once a

bounty of 33 1-3 per cent. in favor of the American competitor. Add to this, freight, insurance, commissions, and the various other charges incident to transporting the commodities of one country to another, and you exhibit an aggregate sufficient to protect men who could be satisfied with moderate gains; but when we proceed to add to this the present heavy tariff duties, the protection is so enormous that we are surprised to find an individual so shameless as to ask for more.

The scheme of increasing national wealth by keeping our money at home is scarcely worthy of serious notice. Money is not wealth, but the mere representative of it. The farmer purchases every necessary with the produce of his land and labor. We would, therefore, respectfully suggest to your honorable body the policy of permitting him to send his produce to that market where he can obtain the highest price, and to purchase whatever necessities he may require, wherever he can obtain them on the cheapest terms. If the wealth of an individual is measured by the quantity of necessities and luxuries he can command, we have no doubt the wealth of every individual would be increased by this policy; and as national is but the aggregate of individual wealth, the national wealth would certainly be increased in the same ratio.

We need not remark how congenial such a policy would be both to the letter and spirit of our Constitution, nor how adverse to both the project of compelling so large a portion of our citizens to abandon those pursuits for which education and experience have best qualified them, and annihilating, by a single act, a great part of the capital vested under the faith of former acts, and guarantied by the letter of that Constitution now wrested to destroy it.

We find no powers, either expressed or implied, granted to Congress by our Constitution, to foster manufactures by ruining commerce and agriculture; and be it remembered that the project now before you is not a commercial regulation, but a manufacturing scheme. We find, however, that unequal taxation is expressly interdicted by the Constitution, and we unhesitatingly affirm that this interdict, so essential to the enjoyment of equal rights, and to the permanent duration of our Union, would be as directly violated by the projected alteration of the tariff, as by a law declaring, in plain language, that the states south of the Potomac should be annually taxed to the amount of six millions of dollars, to be distributed among the cities north of that river; and that the merchants, universally, should pay ten per cent. on their capitals for the same purpose. With this view of the subject, your memorialists respectfully and earnestly pray, that their representatives will guard their interests and their liberties from the ruinous effects of the bill for the alteration of the tariff duties now before your honorable House; a measure pregnant with the most fearful consequences, being as incompatible with the principles of justice as it is with the spirit and letter of our Constitution.

JOHN H. BROWN, *Chairman.*

